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Volume 5, Part 6

Volume Five

ASSISTING U. S. OPERATIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA THROUGH CRYPTOLOGY

Section One

ASSISTANCE THROUGH SIGINT

Part Two

SIGINT SUPPORT OF TACTICAL GROUND COMMANDERS IN SVN

Chapter Six

THE JANUARY 1968 COMMUNIST TET OFFENSIVE

Current Intelligence and History Division
Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Security
Headquarters, United States Army Security Agency
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Chapter Six

THE JANUARY 1968 COMMUNIST TET OFFENSIVE

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Chapter Six

THE JANUARY 1968 COMMUNIST TET OFFENSIVE

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The other day we had an intelligence investigating group here to ...[determine intelligence failures and improvements]. I recall COL Faulk, my G2, ...told them that he didn't really know what the intelligence failures were, but he simply hoped that next time he would have as much intelligence and information on the enemy as he had this last time! . . .The reason that we turned back the enemy. . . , in large measure, was due to your efforts. *

1. Introduction, SYN, General,

Between the 29th and 31st of January 1968, during the proclaimed truce of the oriental Lunar New Year -- TET -- holiday season, North and South Vietnamese Communist units delivered a devastating series of attacks, in a nationwide general offensive, against Government of Vietnam (GVN) population centers and Free World Military Allied Forces installations throughout South Vietnam (SVN). The Communists launched initial major attacks against urban centers as the TET Offensive reached peak intensity by the night of 31 January - 1 February. During the next few days, additional Allied targets were attacked while fighting continued in some cities penetrated during the first nights. By the end

* U, LTG F. C. Weyand, CG, II FFV, address to 303rd RR Bn supporting II FFV, 28 Mar 68, referring directly to ASA SIGINT support to II FFV before and during the TET Offensive.

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of the second week of February, the initial waves of the TET Offensive were ripples on the beach. The enemy had been met, stopped, and driven back in all but three key areas.

The Communist forces in Vietnam were elusive, possessed an uncanny mobility within their limited resources and were masters of cover, concealment, deception and infiltration. They operated primarily against targets of opportunity in battalion-size formations, except for occasional multi-regimental planned operations, such as the TET Offensive. A large concentration of Communists in one area one month could be--and usually was--a barren expanse of jungle the next month. Therefore, COMUSMACV was required to meet varied threats by rapidly moving and deploying his tactical commands on extremely short notice. This also dictated a highly flexible approach to USASA's SIGINT role in direct support of MACV and all its subordinate commands.

Because of the enemy's fragmentation which applied in Vietnam, US divisions rarely deployed as complete entities. Normally, divisions deployed several brigade or battalion-size elements in separate concurrent operations. Occasionally, due to the tactical situation, brigades or battalions operated outside of the division's normal tactical AO, or even out of their respective FFV TAOR's. This frag-

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tactical units caused a corresponding fragmentation of ASA DSU's
mentation of [] as they moved with and continued to [] vice their
repective supported commands.

From SIGINT operational standpoint, COMINT analysts, necessarily, often
were split between the DSU platoons and companies, to provide direct support at
the brigade or separate battalion level. The ASA Company's traffic analysis
capability might have been enhanced if all the analysts could have combined their
efforts at one location. However, that also would have precluded the instant res-
ponse to the Commander-consumer's demands, with which ASA Support has become syn-
omous in SVN. These areas of concern engendered command and control problems all
the way up through the RR Battalions to 509th RR Group Headquarters. The disper-
sion and distances involved and any reduction in face-to-face consumer contacts
adversely affected optimum results. Although problems were numerous and varied,
they were not insurmountable. ASA subordinate commanders resolved many of them.
The group alleviated some problem^s by cross-attaching elements or units from one
battalion to another, and to the 8th RRFS when necessary. The 509th RR Group
stressed high standards of flexibility and resourcefulness on the part of DSU
commanders to insure providing maximum support for the tactical effort in Vietnam--
to improve production for supported commanders.

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In the beginning of 1968, a general summary of the VC/PAVN enemy forces and the friendly FWMAF forces in SVN, the shaded areas indicating those predominantly under VC control, looked about as shown. *

* See Fig. 1, Enemy and Allied Forces, SVN, 1 January 1968.

The two following listings show the disposition and support relationships, as well as the subordination of USASA DSU's, the 509th RR Group organization in January 1968, before TET, * and the changes in those subordinations and

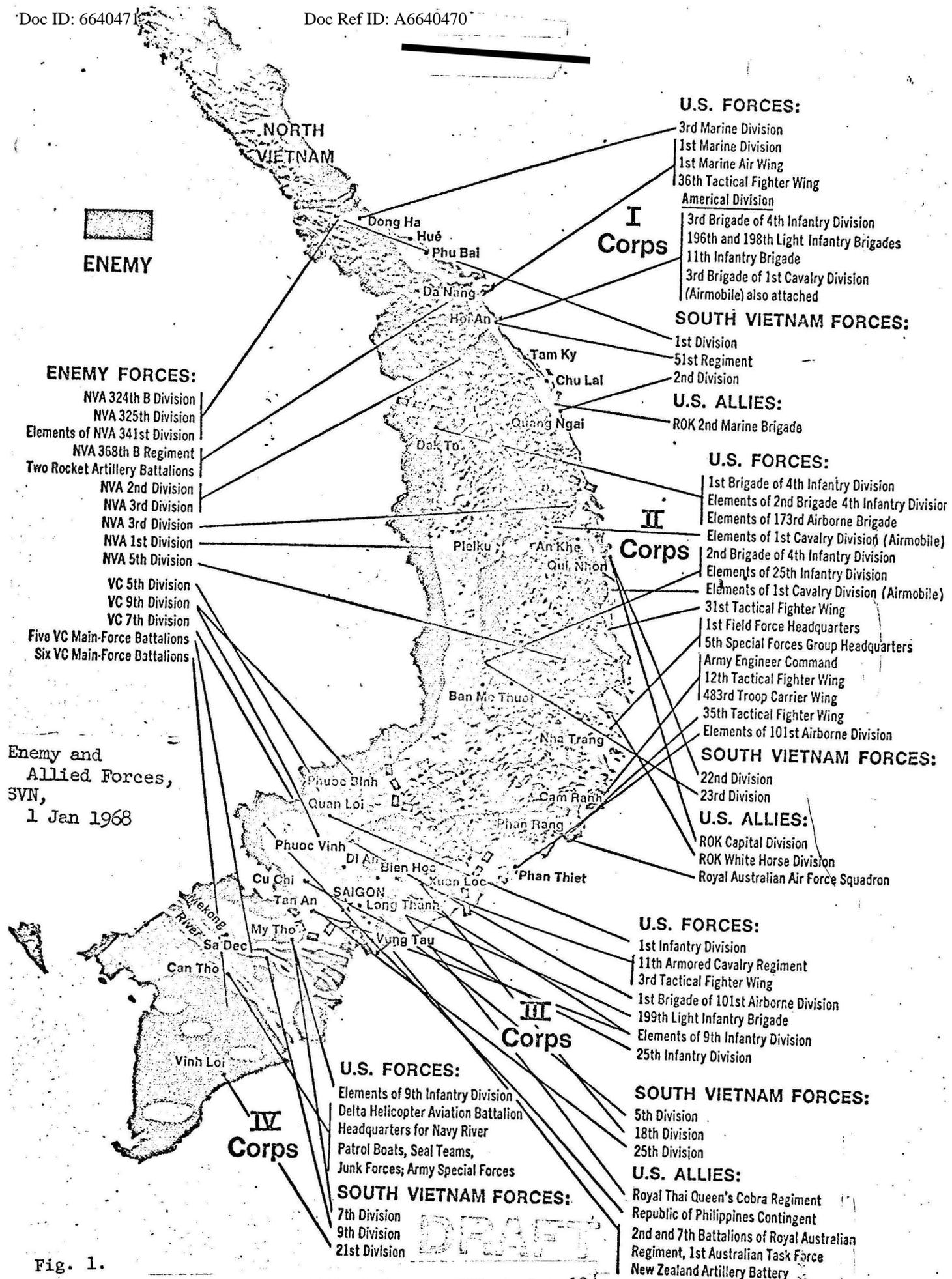
* See Fig. 2, ff: 509th RR Group and DSU Dispositions, Subordination and Support Relationships, SVN, January 1968.

locations reflected in the comparable listing for the 509th RR Group, in May 1968, after TET. *

* See Fig. 3, ff: 509th RR Group and DSU Dispositions, Subordination and Support Relationships, SVN, May 1968.

On 29-30 January 1968, the VC/PAVN forces commenced their general offensive which they hoped would be supported by a general popular uprising against the GVN. The TET Offensive opened with nearly simultaneous, unprecedented, savage, --

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U.S. FORCES:

- 3rd Marine Division
- 1st Marine Division
- 1st Marine Air Wing
- 36th Tactical Fighter Wing
- American Division
- 3rd Brigade of 4th Infantry Division
- 196th and 198th Light Infantry Brigades
- 11th Infantry Brigade
- 3rd Brigade of 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) also attached

I Corps

SOUTH VIETNAM FORCES:

- 1st Division
- 51st Regiment
- 2nd Division

U.S. ALLIES:

- ROK 2nd Marine Brigade

U.S. FORCES:

- 1st Brigade of 4th Infantry Division
- Elements of 2nd Brigade 4th Infantry Division
- Elements of 173rd Airborne Brigade
- Elements of 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)
- 2nd Brigade of 4th Infantry Division
- Elements of 25th Infantry Division
- Elements of 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)
- 31st Tactical Fighter Wing
- 1st Field Force Headquarters
- 5th Special Forces Group Headquarters
- Army Engineer Command
- 12th Tactical Fighter Wing
- 483rd Troop Carrier Wing
- 35th Tactical Fighter Wing
- Elements of 101st Airborne Division

II Corps

SOUTH VIETNAM FORCES:

- 22nd Division
- 23rd Division

U.S. ALLIES:

- ROK Capital Division
- ROK White Horse Division
- Royal Australian Air Force Squadron

U.S. FORCES:

- 1st Infantry Division
- 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment
- 3rd Tactical Fighter Wing
- 1st Brigade of 101st Airborne Division
- 199th Light Infantry Brigade
- Elements of 9th Infantry Division
- 25th Infantry Division

III Corps

SOUTH VIETNAM FORCES:

- 5th Division
- 18th Division
- 25th Division

U.S. ALLIES:

- Royal Thai Queen's Cobra Regiment
- Republic of Philippines Contingent
- 2nd and 7th Battalions of Royal Australian Regiment, 1st Australian Task Force
- New Zealand Artillery Battery

ENEMY FORCES:

- NVA 324th B Division
- NVA 325th Division
- Elements of NVA 341st Division
- NVA 368th B Regiment
- Two Rocket Artillery Battalions
- NVA 2nd Division
- NVA 3rd Division
- NVA 3rd Division
- NVA 1st Division
- NVA 5th Division
- VC 5th Division
- VC 9th Division
- VC 7th Division
- Five VC Main-Force Battalions
- Six VC Main-Force Battalions



Enemy and Allied Forces, SVN, 1 Jan 1968

U.S. FORCES:

- Elements of 9th Infantry Division
- Delta Helicopter Aviation Battalion
- Headquarters for Navy River Patrol Boats, Seal Teams, Junk Forces; Army Special Forces

SOUTH VIETNAM FORCES:

- 7th Division
- 9th Division
- 21st Division

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Fig. 1.

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509th RR Group and DSU Dispositions, Subordination and Support Relationships, Jan 68.

Cover Designator:	USM-#	Strength	Supported Command	Base Location
509th RR Gp	704	4950	USMACV/USARV	Saigon (TSN; JGS)
Headquarters Co		146	509th RR Gp	Saigon (TSN)
101st RR Co (COMSEC)		192	USMACV/USARV	Saigon (TSN; JGS)
RR COMM UNIT VN		144	509th RR Gp/ CRITICOM	Saigon (TSN)
403d RR SOD	653	44	5th SFGp	Nha Trang
8th RRFS (CMA)	808	911	National/509th/ III MAF	Phu Bai
313th RR Bn	613	213	I FFV	Nha Trang
330th RR Co (Ops; CMA)	604	353	MACV/I FFV	Pleiku
371st RR Co	631	114	1st Cav Div (AM)	An Khe
374th RR Co	634	168	4th Inf Div	Pleiku
404th RR Det	628	48	173d Abn Bde	Chulai
406th RR Det	630	48	1/101st Abn Div	Phan Rang
408th RR Det	617	48	196th Inf Bde	Chu Lai
415th RR Det	640	77	11th Inf Bde	Chu Lai
601st RR Det	637	77	198th Inf Bde	Chu Lai
303d RR Bn	614	213	II FFV	Long Binh
175th RR Co (Ops; CMA)	626	294	MACV/II FFV	Bien Hoa
265th RR Co	605	168	101st Abn Div	Bien Hoa
335th RR Co	615	168	9th Inf Div	Bear Cat
337th RR Co	629	168	1st Inf Div	Di An
372d RR Co	633	168	25th Inf Div	Cu Chi
409th RR Det	636	80	11th AC Regt	Xuan Loc
856th RR Det	616	48	199th Inf Bde	Long Binh
224th Avn Bn (RR) (HQ)	624	84	MACV	Saigon (TSN)
138th Avn Co (RR)	624A	192	I FFV	Da Nang
144th Avn Co (RR)	624B	192	I FFV	Nha Trang
1st RR Co (Avn)	638	215	MACV	Cam Ranh Bay
146th Avn Co (RR)	624C	192	II FFV	Saigon (TSN)
156th Avn Co (RR)	624D	167	II FFV	Can Tho

* S, Report, IAPPER-M, HQ USASAPAC, 1 Jan 68, Command Strength, US Army Security Agency, Pacific, Units Located in Vietnam.

Note: Indentation reflects subordination.

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Fig. 2.

509th RR Gp & DSU Dispositions, Subordination
and Support Relationships, 1 Jan 68, Before TET

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509th RR Group and DSU Dispositions, Subordination and Support
Relationships, May 1968

Cover Designator:	Supported Command:	Base Location:
509th RR Group*	USMACV/USARV	no change
Headquarters Co	509th RR Group	no change
101st RR Co (COMSEC)	USMACV/USARV	no change
RR COMM UNIT VN	509th RR Gp/CRITICOM	no change
403d RR SOD	5th SFGp	no change
8th RRFs (CMA)	National/509th/III MAF/ Prov Corps (I CTZ)	Phu Bai
265th RR Co	101st Abn Div (-)	Phu Bai
Det A, 358th RR Co	3d Bde, 82d Abn Div	Gia Le
371st RR Co	1st Cav Div (AM)	Camp Evans (TTH)
313th RR Bn	I FFV	Nha Trang
(330th RR Co (Ops; CMA)	I FFV	Pleiku
374th RR Co	4th Inf Div	Pleiku and dispersed.
Provisional Company	23d Inf Div (AMERICAN)	Chu Lai
408th RR Det	196th Inf Bde	Chu Lai
415th RR Det	11th Inf Bde	Duc Pho
601st RR Det	198th Inf Bde	Chu Lai
404th RR Det	173d Abn Bde	Phu Hiep
406th RR Det	1/101st Abn Div	Phan Rang
303d RR Bn	II FFV	Long Binh
175th RR Co (Ops; CMA)	II FFV	Biên Hoa
335th RR Co	9th Inf Div	Long Thanh North (Bear Cat)
337th RR Co	1st Inf Div	Di An (Ap Nhi)
372d RR Co	25th Inf Div	Cu Chi
409th RR Det	11th Arm Cav Regt	Xuan Loc (Ap Suoi Ca)
Det 1, 856th RR Co	199th Inf Bde	Cat Lai
224th Avn Bn (RR)		no changes.
* Authorized Strength, 1 April 1968:	5,357	
Actual Strength, 1 May 1968:	5,027	

No changes.

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* TSCW, Presentation by CO, 509th RR Group, Commanders' Conference, HQ USASA, May 68;
S, Report, IAPPER-M, HQ, USASAPAC, 1 May 1968, Command Strengths, US Army Security
Agency, Pacific, Units Located in Vietnam.

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even suicidal -- attacks on major cities, Province capitals, District towns, USF and ARVN base installations and USSEF/CIDG camps and outposts throughout SVN. This was conjoined with the beginning of a renewed major offensive in northern SVN, at the Marine bastion at Khe Sanh and along the DMZ. Heavy penetration and city fighting wracked Saigon, Pleiku, Da Nang, Hue, and other principal cities. This effort, while unleashed with a certain amount of shock and local VC success because of its general magnitude, did not catch USF by surprise, but in alert posture and with reinforcements of key bases and certain cities already in motion.

The original attacks of 30 and 31 January had been directed against key urban centers and GVN targets primarily by VC LF and MF units, augmented by NVA personnel and units, while many of the best PAVN and VC units had been withheld from initial attacks, remaining near key Allied military bases, apparently poised to engage Allied reaction forces or follow up original assaults, if successful, with a fresh wave of overwhelming attacks. On 1 February and in the succeeding week, some of those units were committed as the enemy sought to press limited local advantages gained in initial stages. However, the general uprising of the populace, for which the VC had hoped, did not take place and Allied forces reacted

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swiftly to the initial assaults. The attacks which did take place were generally unsuccessful, as Allied Forces expelled the attackers almost immediately in most areas, inflicting very heavy losses on their ranks.

Although considerable evidence pointing to attacks during TET had been available in advance, the Communists achieved a measure of tactical surprise in some areas, chiefly because of the unprecedented scope and nature of their attacks directed, unexpectedly, against urban centers. A CIA Intelligence Memorandum, of 21 February 1968, observed that the intensity of the Communist TET Offensive was reflected in their attacks on 39 of South Vietnam's 44 provincial capitals and the autonomous cities of Da Nang and Saigon. All of them were subjected to artillery and mortar fire or ground assault, and most of them were hit within the first three days. At least 35 of these capitals and the two cities were penetrated physically by Communist armed forces, with varying tenure. In addition, at least 71 district capitals were attacked. The offensive was aimed at civilian centers of authority as well as military installations such as base camps, air fields, and logistical installations. The memorandum summarized Communist objectives as hoping the campaign would culminate in a general uprising which would lead to severe defeats

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for Allied military forces and US withdrawal from South Vietnam. At the same time, they hoped that large-scale political agitation combined with attacks on urban areas would cause the collapse of the South Vietnamese government. The more immediate tactical objectives appeared to have been to: (1) disperse and tie down Allied military units in defensive positions; (2) disrupt South Vietnamese political centers; and (3) demonstrate the inability of the South Vietnamese government to protect the population. In addition, the Communists may have hoped to gain greater control over a larger segment of the rural population by disrupting or destroying the pacification program while Allied forces were protecting urban areas.

Although the Communists failed to spark a general uprising, they disrupted the South Vietnamese governmental apparatus; interrupted the pacification program; and showed the inability of the government to protect the people from Communist terrorism. Despite these gains, the Communists failed to organize popular support and suffered severe losses, particularly among elite sapper and special action units. Although the official body count of 32, 549 enemy dead may have been exaggerated, total enemy losses undoubtedly exceeded that figure, while Allied

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forces captured nearly 8,000 individual weapons, and over 1,200 crew served weapons from the Communists during the attacks. Allied dead were reported as 3,383.

CIA estimated that perhaps 58,000 enemy troops took part in TET attacks throughout South Vietnam; far short of the actual number of enemy troops committed, inasmuch as many local units were built up just prior to the TET attacks, while other participating units were new, or otherwise unidentified. SIGINT and evidence from other collateral sources indicated that many units not mentioned in the CIA memorandum were involved in the TET offensive. Thus, their estimate of 58,000 is far lower than the actual total of enemy troops committed during TET.

SIGINT collection and reporting, aided materially by ARDF pattern analysis studies based on approximately 20,000 location/identification reports in the first two months of the new year, had provided USF throughout SVN with sufficient advance warning of probable VC/PAVN offensive intentions and locations of key enemy build-ups, to rapidly counter their threat. In spite of some of the heaviest sustained fighting of the war in SVN, after the initial two weeks the enemy's

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efforts subsided, having failed to achieve their major objectives. Having gained only a tenuous propaganda value from their intensive and expensive efforts, the Communists had been repulsed and FWMAF re-secured all key areas, inflicting known losses on the enemy of at least a three-division-equivalent--over 30,000 VC/PAVN dead in three weeks--at a highly favorable average loss ratio of over 10 enemy to 1 US in casualties. In the TET Offensive, SIGINT products of the combined services of the 509th RR Group and the cryptologic community were largely responsible for and credited with preventing a possible military disaster, and gave the US/FWMAF the intelligence necessary to achieve a victory over the entire VC/PAVN apparatus in SVN.

In this introduction, then, let us look at an overview of the whole situation involving SIGINT forewarning of TET activities, to set the stage for the following treatment of each of the Corps Tactical Zones and the many activities involved. The following illustrates, briefly and generally, how the 509th RR Group's SIGINT collection and analysis predicted the TET Offensive, reported in thousands of cumulative daily messages and reports to the tactical consumers in SVN, and covers, generally, the attacks which affected the major urban centers.

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Based on COMINT and ARDF collected, analyzed and disseminated daily, the disposition of enemy forces on 30 December 1967, was depicted. * Note the locations, generally, were well away from the heavily populated areas;

* See Fig. 4, ff: Disposition of Enemy Forces, SVN, 30 Dec 67.

many in Cambodia and Laos. The red dots indicated both U/I and identified fixes on major elements, the general deployment of identified enemy formations and direction of movement.

The enemy dispositions of 15 January 1968, showed movement away from the borders and sparsely settled areas, * generally toward major populated areas,

* See Fig. 5, ff: Disposition of Enemy Forces, SVN, 15 January 1968.

much like iron filings being attracted to a magnet. By 30 January, 1968, the major population centers were ringed by enemy forces. * Of course, in the

* See Fig. 6, ff: Disposition of Enemy Forces, SVN 30 January 1968.

day-to-day analysis and plotting of these locations and movements, the actual paths of movement and definite indications of enemy intent and objectives, together with other readable COMINT indicators, gave a much more detailed picture

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than illustrated
 / in these examples which, nevertheless, portrayed the enemy's axes of advance toward the cities and main US/FWMAF centers. *

* See Fig. 7, ff: Enemy Axes of Advance and Movements Prior to TET.

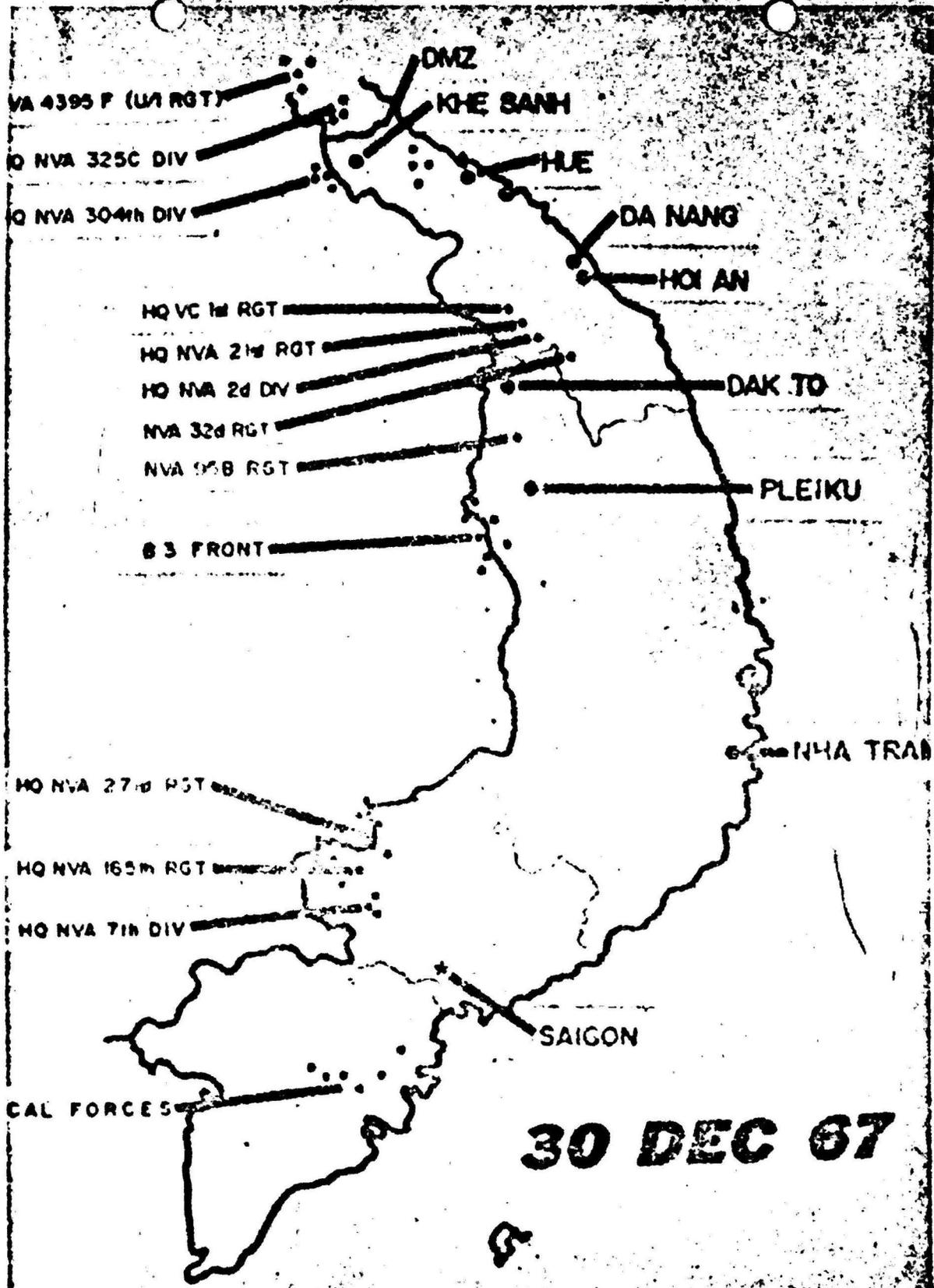
The composite of all SIGINT collected from ASA units in Vietnam and reported to NSA from December 1967 through January 1968, prompted NSA, on 25 January 1968, to issue a DIRNSA Summary report at FLASH precedence, indicating their evaluation of the imminence of hostilities throughout SVN, * followed up by nine additional Southeast Asia Summary Reports (SEAS) prior to the actual commencement of the TET

* SCW, NSA's 2/0/VCM/R32-68, 25 Jan 1968.

Offensive, treating wrap-ups on all the CTZ's in Vietnam. One of these reports advised that hostile action would commence 300200 January 1968, Saigon time, issued on 29 January 1968. These reports summarized, confirmed and lent weight to the thousands of fragmentary and similar summary reports and indications which had been submitted earlier to major tactical commands/had already alerted units, commenced redeployment, dispositions and preparatory coordination and actions. The VC/PAVN

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Fig. 4.

Disposition of Enemy Forces, SVN, 30 Dec 67